

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 233 981

SP 022 523

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TITLE Flexibility Program
INSTITUTION Hamilton Hospital, Trenton, NJ. Inst. for Medicine in Sports.
PUB DATE 22 Apr 83
NOTE 4p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Athletics; *Exercise; Guidelines; *Motor Development; Physical Fitness
IDENTIFIERS *Flexibility (Psychomotor); PF Project

ABSTRACT

These brief guidelines for a muscular flexibility program state that the purpose of such a program is to increase the range of motion in order to avoid injuries and eliminate awkwardness in physical activities. A flexibility program is described as an extension of the warm-up period and should be an ongoing, permanent effort to lengthen muscles. A list of precautions includes warming-up before stretching, avoiding bouncing or jerking on the muscle, stretching a little further each day, spending seven to fifteen minutes daily on stretching, and involving all muscle groups but especially those most involved in one's activity. Instructions are provided for the following exercises: (1) kneeling; (2) the yogi; (3) head to knee - wide straddle; (4) chest to ground - wide straddle; (5) double leg lift; (6) modified hurdler's stretch; (7) standing side bends; (8) head to knees; and (9) toe raise. Recommendations include checking with a physician before undertaking such a program and allowing flexibility to increase gradually. (DC)

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(by: G. Patrick Connors, A.T., C. M.Ed.)

April 22, 1983

FLEXIBILITY PROGRAM

QUESTION: I would like to know what type of flexibility exercise I should do? I run approximately 5 miles per day during the afternoon hours. I'm 37 years old and consider myself in relatively good physical shape.

NAME & ADDRESS WITHHELD

ANSWER: Flexibility is obtained as a result of regular and frequent stretching of muscles over a period of time. The main purposes are to: increase the range of motion in order to avoid tearing or pulling of muscles and tendons during stressful activity; perform a skill through a full range of motion and eliminate awkward movements.

Best described, it is basically an extension of the warm-up period; however, stretching should not be considered a warm-up program in itself. We suggest that a warm-up should consist of performance of the activity one is about to involve in at 1/4 speed, then gradually build up the speed and intensity of the activity to full competitive level. After this has been accomplished, the flexibility program should begin.

A good flexibility program should not be considered as a simple loosening up period in which one prepares for a single regular workout. It is a more permanent effort to lengthen the muscles so that all muscle movement will be easier.

The slow stretching of muscles is not necessarily an easy process. It is accomplished by forcibly (by your own efforts) stretching the muscle beyond its resting position and stretching it GENTLY but forcibly out to a greater length. It should be done on a daily basis with gradual progression. Certain precautions should be taken. The following is a list of the major precautions:

- 1) Participate in a warm-up activity prior to stretching.
- 2) Don't "bounce" on a muscle to stretch it further.
- 3) Don't jerk or pull hard when stretching; do it gradually.
- 4) Each day, try to stretch 1 millimeter further; over a period of days, the effects will be noticeable.
- 5) Spend approximately 7-15 minutes daily on the flexibility routine.
- 6) A good stretching program involves all major muscle groups. However, one should pay particular attention to those muscles that will be most involved in one's activity.

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A runner or jogger should concentrate on the low back and lower limbs. The following is a list of suggestive exercises. An extended number of repetitions should be used for those exercises involving the lower limbs and back.

KNEELING

- 1) Assume a kneeling position.
- 2) Sit on feet with toes pointed directly behind.
- 3) Arch the upper body backwards.
- 4) Extend arms back and away from body by "walking" fingers across floor directly behind body.
- 5) Reach a stretch position and hold for 6 second count.

THE YOGI

- 1) Assume a sitting position on floor.
- 2) Bend the knees and place the soles of your feet together with heels as close to the crotch as possible.
- 3) With your hands on your knees, push gently downward.
- 4) Reach a stretch position and hold for 6 second count.

HEAD TO KNEE - WIDE STRADDLE

- 1) Assume a sitting position on the floor with your legs spread wide.
- 2) Bring forehead to left knee using hands as required.
- 3) Hold 6 second count.
- 4) Repeat to opposite leg.
- 5) Keep legs flat during exercise.

CHEST TO GROUND - WIDE STRADDLE

- 1) Assume a sitting position on the floor with legs spread wide.
- 2) Drop chest forward to the floor or until you have reached a stretch position.
- 3) Hold 6 second count.
- 4) Keep legs flat while holding.

DOUBLE LEG LIFT

- 1) Lie on back on the floor.
- 2) Keep arms at side.
- 3) Bring both legs together, up and over head.
- 4) Hold 6 second count.

MODIFIED HURDLER'S STRETCH

- 1) Assume sitting position on the floor with one leg flat, the other leg bent at knee with the bottom of the foot against the inner thigh of the flat leg.

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- 2) Assisting with hands, bring head to thigh or until a stretch position.
- 3) Hold 6 second count.
- 4) Repeat with opposite leg.
- 5) Keep leg straight while holding.

STANDING SIDE BENDS

- 1) Assume standing position with legs crossed near the ankle.
- 2) Bend to one side.
- 3) Hold 6 seconds.
- 4) Repeat by changing cross-over leg and bend to other side.
- 5) Keep legs straight while bent.

HEAD TO KNEES

- 1) Assume standing position with feet wide apart.
- 2) Using hands for assistance, slowly bring forehead to left knee.
- 3) Keep legs straight.
- 4) Hold 6 seconds.
- 5) Relax and repeat to other knee.

TOE RAISE

- 1) Place ball of each foot at edge of step or block.
- 2) Allow heel to go down until lower leg feels stretched.
- 3) Hold 6 seconds.
- 4) Raise up on toes
- 5) Repeat 10-15 repetitions.

These exercises are suggested for individuals who do not have an injury or history of a prior injury or medical condition. We strongly suggest that you seek the guidance of your physician before beginning any flexibility program.

The most important thing to remember--flexibility will increase gradually.

DON'T FORCE IT.

Please forward comments or questions regarding sports medicine to The Institute for Medicine in Sports, P.O. Box 2621, Hamilton Square, NJ 08690.